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Modoc NS17

[Klamath Reservation]

season however is now late, and frosts warn that winter is near. By mid-October, they have begun the homeward journey to their settlements, there to rebuild the earth lodges, gather firewood, and prepare for the long siege of winter.

Throughout the cycles of the seasons, the tribesmen live under a sense of dependent involvement in a universe that was created in the mythic age by supernatural beings who, establishing the present order, also chose their present form within it. Among the creatures of this world, man is less the exploiter than a fellow being, a relationship honored by returning to the water the gall of a fish that had been caught in order that the fish be requickened, as well as in the annual ceremonies of the first sucker and the ripened wokas. Each individual may draw close to the sources of power; and among the Klamath neither age nor sex is a barrier. The young boy at puberty may be sent on vigil to sacred place—in mountains and at certain rivers or lakes—there to fast, pile stones, run, and swim. In time, he may faint, awaken with blood gushing from his mouth, and hear the song that is his power. A girl during the time of her puberty dance goes off to sleep apart during the day; then she too may hear a song. Those mourning a deceased mate or child may "travel," seeking solace and power, for the spirit confers power through pity. Those who seek help desire a specific power, and they may pray for prowess in hunting, gambling, in attracting a mate, or in acquiring wealth. One who already has a spirit associate may seek for others; and some, either through inheritance or by the successive acquisition of tutelaries, may go on to become shamans. Some persons may reject the call. One middle-aged woman recounts a waking dream she had in her girlhood of a stag in full antlers rising out of the waters. Had she followed the opening thus offered she might have acquired great power, but she was afraid and let the chance slip by.

Among the Modoc, says Ray, powers come only to those who seek to become shamans. The call, which comes in a dream, is legitimate only in mature men and women past menopause and may not be experienced in old age. The seeker, like his Klamath counterpart, undertakes a five-day quest; but the chief of the spirit abodes in which he spends his vigil are the house pits of deceased shamans. Those spirits that come to him choose him